

TWIN FALLS TIMES NEWS

Idaho students beat national average on science test

By REBECCA BOONE
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BOISE, Idaho (AP) -- Fourth- and eighth-graders in Idaho scored higher on a national science test than most of their counterparts nationwide, the state Department of Education announced Wednesday.

The test results may be deceiving, however. When the results are divided by ethnicity, the bulk of Idaho's fourth-grade students - white students - actually scored worse than white students in the rest of the nation. And though Idaho's Hispanic students scored better than their counterparts nationwide, they still lagged behind white fourth-graders' scores.

The 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress is considered the best measure of how students perform over time and how one state stacks up against another. It compares state subgroups to subgroups in other states.

Because of the way the test results are tallied, it's not clear if Idaho's higher overall scores are because Hispanic students are performing that much better than others nationwide or simply because Idaho has fewer minority students than many other states.

The discrepancy wasn't found among Idaho eighth-graders, where both white and Hispanic students scored better than their counterparts nationwide.

"I think what it does is raise an important question that we should be asking," said Allison Westfall, spokeswoman for the Idaho Department of Education. "What's happening in our younger grade? Is it a curriculum issue? Should something be added?"

The test includes four categories: science, earth science, physical science and life science.

Overall, Idaho stacked up fairly well, according to the results. Only six states had higher average science scores than Idaho's eighth-graders. Among fourth-graders, 12 states had higher average scores. The state's scores remained fairly steady compared to Idaho fourth- and eighth-graders who took the test in 2000, the last year it was offered, officials said.

"We are pleased to see our students perform well compared to those other states," state Schools Superintendent Marilyn Howard said in a prepared statement. "We hope to see performance improve over time as Idaho focuses more on science in the coming years."

The average score for fourth graders in Idaho was 155, six points higher than the national average. About 75 percent of the state's students scored basic or better, but only 29 percent scored proficient or better - a skill level showing that the students can handle challenging subject matter, which is considered the goal.

Among eighth graders, Idaho's scores were an average of 12 points higher than the national scores, with 36 percent of students scoring at proficient or better levels, compared to just 27 percent of students nationally. About 71 percent of the state's eighth-graders scored basic or better, compared to 57 percent nationwide.

South Idaho Press

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